

1946

UA3/2/4 Commencement Speech

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I congratulate you who are graduating tonight because of your youth and your enormous possibilities for usefulness and enjoyment. In the final analysis these are the ends of education - that you might serve better and that you might have more fun while you are here. There are, however, a few special reasons why I want to congratulate you. First, that you have had the opportunity to attend this excellent school under the capable leadership of Mr. Betts and a capable staff in this beautiful building so well equipped. What contrast between it and the schools which I and most members of the audience of my age attended. You should be grateful to those who planned it, to the tax payers who made it possible, and to your parents, who, in many cases, made sacrifices that you might be free to come to it.

I would congratulate you, too, on those personal qualities of brain and health and perserverance that brought you to this happy hour. I am saddened tonight by the knowledge that there are others who started with you and who should be receiving their diplomas with you, but who, through sickness in the family or economic need, were obliged to assume burdens which made further attendance impossible; or sadder still, who lacked the courage and determination to stay in school and become eligible for the honor which is yours tonight. Then let us not forget the children in the hollows and barren places of Kentucky who never had your opportunity and those others in the Feeble-minded Institute at Frankfort and those in a state of invalidism at home who never had a chance.

Let us be glad, too, that you live in Kentucky, a state of incomparable beauty. Last weekend it was my good fortune to be at Kentucky Dam. Never before I think have I seen such beauty of redbud and dogwood as you see it here, but not in such profusion. I hope you have not neglected the opportunity to enjoy it. I am reminded of the youth in Shrepshire Lad who had the good sense to take time

out to look at the cherry blossoms. Remember what he said:

"Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bow
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide

Now, of my three score years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score
It only leaves me fifty more

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow."

Neither do you, however long your span, have time to look at things in bloom in Kentucky or beauty wherever in the future it may present itself. Dr. Mims told me of a trip on an airplane when out of the clouds they came into the beauty of a sunset, and he was enraged and disgusted that so far as he could tell, no one else on the plane looked at it. They were too busy ready^{ly} and talking. Dr. Mims is the great speaker in the field of literature, yet many of my students on Wednesday were too busy with little affairs to hear him. Whether it be a lovely musical program or a great painter many likewise fail to take advantage of the opportunity. Too busy with little things. Build for yourself a memory book of things and people and places which are beyond the commonplace of ordinary experience as a source of enjoyment forever. I have in mine: Mrs. Fisk, Harry Lauder, Will Rogers, Will Durant, - I added just this year Lawrence Olivier and his lovely wife Vivien Leigh in "Antony and Cleopatra" when I was with the team in New York. Beautiful paintings, beautiful buildings, beautiful landscapes, singers and speakers of power. How long the list is that crowd my book. How many of you I wonder have taken time to enjoy the statue of Dr. Cherry which stands in front of Cherry Hall. It is the last major work of one of America's greatest sculptors. How many of you have taken time to visit and enjoy the replica of perhaps the most beautiful building of Greece which is to say the world. How many of you have made it your business to enjoy the beauty of Mammoth Cave and of

Cumberland Falls and Kentucky Lake. How many have found happiness in the beauty of the trees bursting into leaf, and the things in bloom about you. If you haven't, don't be like that. I rather think one of the greatest stinkers of all time was the poor devil of whom it was said:

"A primrose by the rivers brim
A simple primrose was to him
And nothing more."

How glad you ought to be that you live in the United States of America with its freedom of worship, of speech, of press, and of assembly with your right to be safe in person and property against unreasonable search and seizure. Not to be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, entitled to a speedy trial by an impartial jury with the right to know the charges, to face the witnesses, to have your own witnesses and lawyer, subject to no excessive bail, excessive fines or cruel and inhuman punishment. In most of the world such rights are unknown. A large part of the world's population longs to come here to enjoy these rights which our forefathers came to secure for themselves and for us. Ours is the responsibility to hand them down to those who come after us. This is our most important task. No sacrifice is too great. We shall be unworthy of those who handed it down to us through argument, through sacrifice, and through death if we fail through having done less than our best. 'Tho dulled by oft repetition till we mostly hear the words without thinking them, the challenge of Patrick Henry, is now as then, a challenge not to be ignored:

"Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?"

Indeed, the danger which confronts us in the present emergency is far more terrible than that which faced the colonies in the Revolution because this threat is slavery of the mind and loss of all the rights which I have enumerated.

I am persuaded that education adds to the usefulness and happiness of those who have it. Believe it or not, it still adds, too, to income. I wish not

only for your sake but also for the world's benefit that all of you might have the benefits of a college education. I covet for Western your presence there. The nearness of Western to be sure gives you an advantage over those graduating tonight who are far distant from a college. I should say that your greatest obligation is measure up to your greatest possibilities of development, to be as big as you possibly can. I think further education helps you do that. Obviously if it is quite impossible for you to go to college, the challenge is still yours that you be as big as you can. As I understand the challenge of Jesus of Nazareth it is that though you cannot equal the perfection of His life, you shall take it as an ideal toward which to strive. I challenge you likewise to strive continuously to reach your highest possibilities and not be satisfied with less accomplishment. Washington & Lee University some years ago published a measuring stick for you to test yourself by to see if you are made of the stuff that will enable you to succeed in college:

"First: Are you man enough to get up promptly every morning, get to your meals and classes on time every day and go to bed at a fixed hour every night without a word of reminder from anybody.

Second: Are you man enough to go off by yourself every day and study all your lessons till you know them without having anybody tell you to get to work?

Third: Are you man enough to carry loose change in your pocket without spending it?

Fourth: Are you man enough, when another fellows answer is in easy reach to fail on an examination rather than cheat?

Which being interpreted means that success in college, and I would add equally in life, is most likely to come to him who is master of himself, who is able to forego present pleasure for future accomplishment, and whose honest and integrity are above question. These are challenging inquiries. I hope you don't look too bad to yourself as measured by them. I hope too that you may determine to improve your score on this test.

I suggested education as a factor in increasing your usefulness. Heaven

knows you will not suffer for lack of problems. I shall name a few. First, as I have said, comes the preservation of democracy. This is first because the others have no significance if we lose it.

Suppose we start with a big one. Can capital and labor be led to work together in fairness to each other and to the public and to work in friendliness and cooperation instead of, as is often the case, in enmity, distrust, and combat. Fortunately, there are industrial plants in operation in which peace and cooperation prevail. In most cases some form of profit sharing is in operation. Thus the worker is directly interested in the success of the business. Slow-downs, producing less than he can, strikes, therefore are as unpopular with labor as with management. Of course, trust in management and usually representation by labor in management are essential. Certainly something must be done since the general public has a right to protection from dictatorship on the part of either management or labor. Obviously, we need representatives in Congress who not for labor or management or the Farm Bureau or the American Legion, or for the silver miners, or for the oil interest, but who are for America. Maybe you can improve the situation. Certainly to do so you must accept your responsibility as an intelligent voter. So long as 50% of eligible voters stay at home when the polls are open, as at present, there is not much hope.

Second problem - Brains and money necessary for training frequently do not go together. We help many poor students earn a portion of their expenses at Western. I know of no way, however, by which a Freshman can earn all expenses, and each year I write with sadness of the situation to youngsters whose usefulness as trained citizens society can ill afford to lose. The hundred tuition scholarships provided from the Ogden fund and the fact that you can live at home offer you an opportunity that is presented few graduates. Some think national scholarships based on ability and need are desirable. What do you think and what will

you do about it?

Such problems as decent housing, food and clothing for all, the correction of remedial defects of mind and body, the provision for necessary dental and medical care, the providing of recreational facilities have always been with us. We are blessed with a better health department in Warren County than most; we have an unusually efficient group of doctors and dentists who give much free and unselfish service, but the problem remains as worthy of study and labor. There are still houses in Bowling Green in which people live which are unfit for habitation, boys and girls get into trouble and go to the reform school who might have been saved if wholesome recreation had been available, etc.

You are likely to see the application of atomic energy to machines with its certain reduction in hours of employment necessary. What shall be done with the increased hours of leisure? A professional friend of mine told me once that he thought many machines should be destroyed so that more men had to work longer. He judged increased leisure led to unhappiness and was a major problem. I noticed, though, that he enjoyed his leisure. Maybe education, which surely widens one's capacity for enjoyment, and the worthy use of leisure is going to be needed in greater amount by a greater percentage of the population. I leave that for you to work on.

One thing of importance that is happening in Kentucky is the coming of industry to the state. Calvert City, Louisville, Brandenburg, are a few of the centers of the movement, but little towns throughout the state are building factories, and we rejoice in those which have come to Bowling Green. Their advent means more prosperity in the community, a broader tax base for the state affording improved services to its people. You can help in the expansion of this program.

Many more problems could be discussed if we had more time. As in these, you, I hope, will be ashamed not to have a part.

You are, no doubt, wondering when I will stop talking and let you receive your diplomas and go about your happy business. Well, I would be unhappy to turn you loose without talking about you and the future a bit more.

I am immensely interested in your having fun - fun from books, fun from watching games and taking part in them, fun from fishing, fun from seeing things, fun from friends. I wish I had time to elaborate on each of these. Let me at least tell you what fishing is:

"Fishin' aint just ketchin fish
In a lake or river
Tho a fresh bass on a dish
Does make ye sort of shiver
Fishin's sittin on some spot
Where it's not too cold and not too hot
Without thinkin on your lot
Fortune, love, or liver.

Fishin's gettin' far away
From all the noise and flurry;
Gettin off where you can play
Nothin's in a hurry
There to sorter loaf and set
Blind to all the things that fret
And forgettin all regret
Quarrels, cares, and worry."

See what I mean, The same holds true for most wholesome recreation. I really worry about those who don't like games of all sorts and who regard any time not spent at work as wasted. You will find time for work and these, too, I hope.

Nobody has a right to expect a free ticket through life. You must each pay his way. This will require some sacrifice and self-denial. The best loved Southerner, I think, is Robert E. Lee. Mr. Freeman is responsible for the story that when the General was quite old, a mother brought her boy to him for advice as to what she should do to help the child be great. I doubt that she expected the answer the beloved sage gave, for placing his hand on the boy's head, this devout soldier and educator said, "Mother, teach him to deny himself." You would not be

worthy of your education and the sacrifices which have been made for you if there were no self-denial in your life, because I think happiness never comes from selfishness. The story is told of a French soldier who lay in a hospital after the amputation of a leg following a wound on the field of battle. A visitor expressed her sympathy that he had lost his leg, whereupon the soldier replied, "I didn't lose it. I gave it." What a difference!

Robert Browning has Paracelsus say:

" I am a wanderer; I remember well one journey
 How I feared the track was missed;
 So long the city I desired to reach
 Lay hid; when suddenly its spires afar
 Flashed through the circling clouds;
 You may conceive my transport,
 Soon the vapors closed again
 But I had seen the city and once such glance
 No darkness could obscure; nor shall the present -
 A few dull hours, a passing shame or two,
 Destroy the vivid memories of the past,
 I will fight the battle out."

Life is like that. I have a firm confidence that God gives all men and will give to you here and there on your journey a vision of the city, namely a vision of what you can be and do at your best and that if you fail to live up to your glorious possibilities it will be not because you were denied the vision but because you in discouragement turned back on one of those dark days when the vapors hid it from you. You will need God and his church on your journey because these will help to keep the vision clear. Recently in New York it was my good fortune to see the great current hit, "The King and I" I confess that I did not enjoy it as much as "Oklahoma" and "South Pacific," but no one who has seen it can ever forget toward the close when the heroine looks at the King who is on his death bed and asks, "Do you think you have been as good a King as you might have been?" After thinking a bit, he replies, "I don't suppose anybody has ever been as good a King as he might have been." So here's wishing for you that you have a lot of fun, that you may pay your way by worthy service, and that you may be at least nearly as big as you might have been.